



"EVERYONE AT HOME NOW"

A Strategy
for Ending Homelessness
in Snohomish County, Washington
by 2016

January 2006



E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

We view homelessness as intolerable. Our vision is that every person in Snohomish County has safe, appropriate, and affordable housing.

This 10 Year Plan is a means to achieve this vision.

Snohomish County is faced with the immense challenge of addressing the social issue of homelessness. Each day, the lives of homeless individuals and families unravel towards chaos as they struggle unsuccessfully to meet their basic needs and regain a permanent place to live. And, each day, homelessness erodes the stability and well-being of all residents in Snohomish County.

The causes of homelessness are numerous and complex. No single solution will resolve this social issue. Preventing homelessness is the most cost effective solution, in both financial and human terms. However, when homelessness cannot be prevented, opportunities to regain housing as quickly as possible and to access the support to develop skills and resources necessary to maintain permanent housing, needs to be readily available. These housing opportunities must be designed to meet the specific and diverse needs of the homeless population and to support each person to reach her/his potential for independence and self-sufficiency.

Snohomish County believes that ending homelessness is a critical foundation for increasing our community's social and economic health.

To this end, Snohomish County recommends six long term policy initiatives which will create the sustainable solutions necessary to end homelessness by the year 2016.

- ◆ **Expand affordable housing coupled with appropriate support services where need is most prevalent.**

Permanent, service-enriched housing and other innovative models that combine housing with the services necessary to keep people housed need to be developed to address the needs of the homeless. **The Plan's development goal is to increase housing for the homeless by 2,500 units over 10 years.**

- ◆ **Expand homeless prevention services.**

Increasing resources for prevention will keep families and individuals housed, conserving and saving limited community resources.

- ◆ **Develop a community wide access system to minimize the duration and impact of homelessness and maximizing effective resource allocation**

A community-wide system that reduces the duration of homelessness, improves the use of housing resources, and assists in improving identification of housing and service needs will make rehousing and prevention efforts far more efficient and effective.

- ◆ **Base the development of new housing stock and services upon accurate need and capacity data.**

Accurate and timely needs assessments and outcome data will be used to make sure appropriate funding decisions are made. A housing production plan will be developed to address the specific needs of the homeless population and other at-risk households.

◆ **Provide funding to maintain existing housing and services that demonstrate measurable outcomes and overall progress towards ending homelessness.**

The provision of ongoing funding for existing projects and services should be based upon documentation of a continuing need and consistently achieved outcomes. While changes in the service delivery system are necessary, the transition to new models must be planned strategically as to not overwhelm or decrease the county's current capacity.

◆ **Develop housing coupled with appropriate support services targeted for chronically homeless persons.**

The Plan recommends the creation of and increase in the number of a variety of housing types and resources, including creating barrier free housing for individuals not eligible for other housing options due to their current or recent history of criminal activity, difficult behavior, drug addiction, sex crimes, and/or chronic mental health issues.

If Snohomish County is to end homelessness, public mainstream agencies and services must work together.

Significant steps have been taken to create partnerships among mainstream public services and non-profit agencies. Additional changes to mainstream services are needed to effectively deal with homelessness.

This Plan advocates for increased cooperation and partnership between the **Department of Social and Health services** and service providers in order to ameliorate system policies and procedures contributing to homelessness. Among the actions to be taken are:

- * Advocating for policies that ensure viable housing plans are in place for youth exiting foster care, for the temporarily unemployable due to disability, and for those being released from jails, hospitals and similar institutions.

In order to prevent offender release from incarceration resulting in homelessness, the **Department of Corrections and Snohomish County Jail** currently collaborate in transition planning before the offender is due to be released. This Plan advocates for policies, systemic changes, and increased resources that:

- * Promote consistency in notification protocols to help the community better understand release and supervision processes and help offenders better prepare to reenter society before they are released.

In Snohomish County, there are about 660 **Homeless Veterans** on any given night. This Plan advocates for increasing resources and services as well as enhancing services already in place:

- * Increase barrier-free housing by 200 units over the next ten years; and expand supportive services available to veterans while making sure veterans know about and apply for eligible benefits.

For **Homeless Youth**, the transition into a successful independent adult life requires the provision of multiple support services. This Plan advocates for policy and systemic changes that will result in:

- * Increased service enriched permanent housing for youth and young adults 16-24; and expanded early intervention strategies to prevent youth homelessness.

Resources to treat, support, and house people with chronic **Mental Health** issues have steadily declined. Many homeless individuals have a mental illness. In order to bring an end to homelessness we must:

- * Develop at least 50 units of safe haven housing for the chronically homeless; and increase funding so that persons with mental illness can access services they need to live independently.

People with Disabilities need barriers to employment removed and access to universally accessible housing in order to live as independently as possible. This plan advocates for increased housing opportunities for persons with disabilities by:

- * Expanding homeownership opportunities for the disabled and developing more affordable, accessible housing.

Substance Abuse Treatment must be readily available to help people with chemical addictions obtain and maintain housing. In Snohomish County we need:

- * Increased permanent housing for persons with chemical addiction; and more treatment resources for those with a dual diagnosis of mental illness and chemical addiction.

Homelessness affects the complexity of health issues and in turn vastly increases the cost of **Healthcare**. In order for people to stay housed, we need to:

- * Increase the capacity for primary health care providers to serve homeless individuals and improve access to comprehensive dental care for the homeless.

In order to obtain and maintain housing people experiencing homelessness must have access to **Employment and Other Income Sources**. In order for families and individuals to acquire the resources necessary for housing stability we need to:

- * Provide longer-term, career-based employment services, providing the skills necessary to attain self-sufficiency; and streamline the application and approval process for Social Security, DSHS cash benefits, and other supplemental income sources.

Everyone At Home Now is the first phase of the planning process and implementation strategy for ending homelessness in Snohomish County. The second phase will include: designing the structure and composition of a high-level Oversight Committee; collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing new and more accurate data regarding the number of homeless, the availability of housing and services, and the costs of creating permanent housing with supportive services; devising specific annual objectives and a housing development plan based upon this Plan's recommendations; and mapping out annual timelines with clear responsibilities for implementation.

We invite you and your organization to join us in this monumental task. We need:

**YOUR compassion for those in need,
YOUR commitment to ending homelessness,
YOUR ingenuity to devise new creative solutions to old social problems, and
YOUR support and endorsement of these recommendations,
to ensure the successful implementation of "Everyone At Home NOW"!**

The plan provides case management services, assistance in finding housing, employment, medical and psychiatric treatment, as well as aid in readjustment to the community.

This Plan advocates for the following policy and systemic changes, increased resources, and services enhancements.

- DOC is developing and promoting consistency in notification protocols that will help increase community understanding of the release and supervision processes.
- The implementation and use of video conferencing to communicate within and across organizations and to connect the offender to community support service providers prior to release.
- Community preparation for the offender's return before release (i.e. offender specific teams that have been established such as Community Accountability Boards, "A" team, Neighborhood Readiness Teams, Local Area Teams, and/or subcommittees of task forces or coalitions).

Homeless Veterans

There are more than 670,000 (Census 2000) veterans living in Washington State. Of this number, 65,900 reside in Snohomish County, and of these it is estimated that about 660 are homeless on any given night in the county. There is a large concentration of homeless veterans within the city limits of Everett - the county seat - and along an urban 15-mile stretch in close proximity to Interstate 5. Most of the limited temporary housing, shelter, food banks and medical services are in, or near Everett. The situation is more problematic for the large numbers of homeless veterans who can be found in the small towns and the vast rural areas of the county, which encompasses 2,090 square miles. Access to community services including food, shelter, and medical care is extremely limited beyond the urban areas. The urban service areas can be reached by public transportation if individuals have funds available, or by walking.

For the veterans who reside in the rural outskirts of the county, there is very limited public transportation to the services provided in the urban areas.

In addition to the complex set of factors affecting people experiencing homelessness, including extreme shortage of affordable housing, livable income, and access to health care, a large number of displaced and at-risk veterans live with lingering effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance abuse, compounded by a lack of family and social support networks.

The most effective programs for homeless and at-risk veterans appear to be community-based, nonprofit, "veterans helping veterans" groups. Nationwide, the programs that work best feature transitional housing that allows the at-risk veteran to live in a structured, substance-free environment. Because government money for homeless veterans is currently limited and serves only one in ten of those in need, it is critical that community groups reach out to help provide the support, resources, and opportunities most citizens take for granted: housing, employment, and health care.

This plan advocates for increasing resources and services as well as enhancing services already in place in the county, on the local, state and federal level to support veterans who are either at risk of becoming homeless or are already homeless.

- Collaborate with other social service providers to increase supportive services and awareness of housing resources to veterans on the verge of homelessness.
- Work with elected officials to assure local, state and federal monies are being fully utilized on behalf of at-risk and homeless veterans.
- Increase barrier-free housing by 200 units over the next 10 years.
- Assure veterans are aware of veterans' benefits and assist them in applying for these benefits as well as other financial aid programs (Social Security, Social Security Disability) that will provide them the financial means to procure housing.